

## EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION IN ODISHA

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### ABSTRACT

*Education is regarded as an important tool and means for creating awareness and adequate knowledge and skills. So for the upliftment of women's status, awareness is needed and that could only be possible through education. The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in September 1995 emphasized the need to equalize opportunities and status of women. It was the first international women's conference at which the Platform for Action contained a section addressing the rights of girls and young women. The Beijing summit stressed that the implementation of the 'Platform for Action' agreed upon by participating governments requires commitment from them and the international community. In spite of several steps taken for women empowerment by both central and state government wide gap still persists among the literacy rate of male and female. Many factors are responsible for non-enrolment and high dropout rates of girls. She is discriminated in feeding, attention, clothing and care. The family is ready to spend more money on male children for their clothes, schooling, health care and nutrition than on female Odisha is committed to provide educational opportunities for girls which addresses the learning needs of 3-6 yrs. old children and takes the steps for the implementation of Right to Education Act, 2009.*

**Keywords:** Education, Empowerment, Women, Development.

### Introduction

The importance of reducing the gender gap by targeted strategies to promote girls' education has been stressed since the 1990s. It hovered heavy in the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990, adopted by 155 countries. Empowerment brings the full identity & potentiality of the individual and education is the fundamental right of every girl as per Right to Education Act 2009. Empowering women increases the awareness, exposing them to acquire knowledge and skills, increases their ability to access resources & services, thereby making themselves independent. Literacy does not mean that women should only be in a position to read or write but understand the various issues of life and get the solution to the problems they face in family, community as well as in the society. So equal educational opportunities should be provided to all women to keep them at par in every dimension of life. India is the fastest growing and second most populated country with nearly 50% of female population but the literacy rate falls below as compared to the global standard. The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in September 1995 emphasized the need to equalize opportunities and status of women. It was the first international women's conference at which the Platform for Action contained a section addressing the rights of girls and young women. The Beijing summit stressed that the implementation of the 'Platform for Action' agreed upon by participating governments requires commitment from them and the international community. By making national and international commitments for action, including those made at the conference, government and the international community recognize the need to take priority action for the empowerment and advancement of women. Development is only possible through the provision of basic education, lifelong education, literacy and training and primary health care for girls and women. The report brought out by the United Nations called Women-challenge to the Year 2000 remarks that "Rural societies, which depend heavily on women for their survival are especially resistant to educating them. This paper is based on secondary data collected from various sources and deals with the aspects i.e., to present the profile of literacy status of Odisha, to present the various factors affecting the girl's education, and government initiatives to improve the educational status of women.

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### Profile of Odisha

Odisha is a state of India with a population of 4,19,74,218 (Po. Census, 2011). The sex ratio (number of females per 1,000 males) is 972. 49 per cent of state's population is female. About 13.285 of the population live in the urban areas. There are about 50,000 villages in the state. The state of Orissa is having the highest concentration of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population in India. 38.41 per cent of its population constitute the backward population consisting of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC population is 22.21 per cent and ST population is 16.2 per cent) and socially and economically backward section constitute about 22.21 per cent of the total population of the state. The literacy rate of Odisha as per 2011 Census is 72.9 per cent. In rural areas the literacy rate is 70.2 per cent whereas in urban areas it is 85.7 per cent. The male rural literacy rate is 79.6 per cent whereas the female literacy rate in rural area is 60.7 percent. The male literacy rate in urban area is 90.7 per cent and in case of females the literacy rate is 80.4 per cent. Among the districts the highest literacy rate in rural areas is found in the district of Jagatsinghpur (86.5%) whereas the highest literacy rate in urban areas recorded is in the district of Khordha (91.0 %). The lowest literacy rate of 43.9 per cent is recorded in the rural areas of Nabarangpur district whereas the lowest urban literacy rate of 74.5 per cent is recorded in the district of Malkangiri. The highest male literacy rate of 92.5 per cent is recorded in the rural areas of Jagatsinghpur district whereas the highest urban male literacy rate recorded is in the district of Khordha (94.2 %). The lowest rural male literacy rate is recorded in the district of Koraput (54.1 %) whereas the lowest urban male literacy rate is recorded in the district of Malkangiri (83.4 %). The highest female literacy rate in rural areas is noticed in the district of Jagatsinghpur (80.4 %) whereas the lowest rural female literacy rate recorded is in the district of Koraput (31.3 %). The highest urban female literacy rate of 87.5 per cent is recorded in the district of Khordha whereas the lowest urban female literacy rate 64.9 per cent recorded is in the district of Malkangiri. The state has widespread poverty, maternal and infant mortality and incidence of malnutrition and low life expectancy. 9<sup>th</sup> Plan approach of Government of Odisha is a milestone for the development of the women of Orissa because it gives emphasis on the following aspects: Women's education and eradication of illiteracy, a life cycle approach to women's health as well as focus on reproductive health, capacity building and skill improvement of women, self-help groups of women, funds allocation and adequate resources for women's development, improve working condition, remove gender bias in recruitment, etc. (Economic Survey, 2000-2001).

### Educational Status of Women in Odisha

Odisha has 30 districts and female literacy rate varies extensively from district to district. The table below shows the comparison between the literacy rate of both India and Odisha on the basis of 1991, 2001 & 2011 Census report

**Table 1: Literacy Rate of India/Orissa:1991, 2001 and 2011**

	1991		2001		2011	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
India	64.13	39.29	74.64	54.03	82.14	65.46
Orissa	63.09	34.68	75.95	50.97	81.59	64.01

Source: Census of India 2001, series 22 prov. Population total Orissa.

The female literacy rate of Odisha has increased from 34.68 percent in 1991 to 64.01 per cent in 2011. Again, as per the 2001 Census report state's female literacy rate has further improved to 50.97 per cent when the national average was 54.03 per cent. But still there is a gap of about 4.03 per cent so far as the female literacy of the state is concerned. But 2011 Census shows good result while comparing literacy rate of female of the state Odisha at the national level. The central and state government's continuous efforts and initiative to improve the female literacy in the state, good result has been achieved so far. Again, when we compare the literacy rate of male in India with Orissa it is found that the gap is very nominal, i.e., literacy rate of males in India is 64.13 per cent whereas it is 63.09 per cent in the state as per 1991 Census and the gap is just about 1.4 per cent. As per the 2001 Census report, the male literacy rate of India is 74.64 per cent whereas literacy rate of male of the state is 75.95 per cent. Here, the state average has gone up by 1.31 per cent than that of the national average as per 2001 Census report & 2011 Census shows the minimal difference of female literacy rate between India and the state. This shows that there is a strong consciousness for male literacy in Orissa.

Again, when we compare the literacy rate of female with that of the males, both in case of India and Odisha, it is found from above table that female literacy rate has been consistently lower than the literacy rate of male. The female literacy rate of India as per 1991 Census was 39.29 per cent, and the literacy rate of male was 64.13 per cent, that means the gap is two times more, i.e., 24.84 per cent. But

as per 2001 Census report the female literacy rate is 54.03 per cent and male literacy rate is 74.64 per cent and the gap is about 20.61 per cent. 2011 Census shows a gap of 17.58 percent of male and female literacy rate. It shows there is a little improvement in the female literacy in the national average.

When we compare the literacy rate of male and female in Orissa it is found that as per 1991 Census report the male literacy rate was 63.09 per cent and female literacy rate was 34.68 per cent which means the gap was 28.41 per cent and this gap was further reduced to 24.98 per cent in 2001 as per 2001 census report and as per 2011 census the gap has been reduced to 17.58. This shows there is gradual decrease in the difference between male and female literacy rate.

The literacy level of women in Odisha, both in rural and urban sectors, is presented in the following Table 2.

**Table 2: Literacy Rate of Rural and Urban Women in Orissa: 1991, 2001 and 2011**

Area	1991		2001		2011	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Rural	60.00	30.79	73.57	47.22	79.06	60.07
Urban	81.21	61.18	88.32	72.68	74.31	70.72

Source: Census of India 2001, series 22 prov. Population total Orissa.

From the above table it is found that as per 1991 Census the gap between the rural male literacy rate and rural female literacy rate was found to be 29.21 per cent. But the rural male literacy rate and rural female literacy rate as per 2001 Census the gap was found to be 26.35 % . 2011 census shows a gap of 19% between rural male and female literacy. 73.57 per cent and 47.22 per cent respectively which means the gap is of about 26.35 percent. 2011 Census shows the gap of 19.0 percent between rural male and female literacy. Again, the urban female literacy and rural female literacy rate as per 1991 census report was 61.18 per cent and 30.79 per cent respectively, that means the gap was 30.39 per cent and as per 2001 Census report the urban female literacy rate and rural female literacy rate was 72.68 per cent and 47.22 per cent respectively and the gap was 25.46 per cent that means the gap has been reduced within a decade to 4.93 percent. As per 2011 census the difference between urban and rural female literacy rate is found to be 9.65%. When we compare the rural female literacy rate between 1991 and 2001 census it is found that the gap is 16.43 per cent. The literacy rate of Odisha as per 2011 Census is 72.9 per cent. In rural areas the literacy rate is 70.2 per cent whereas in urban areas it is 85.7 per cent. The male rural literacy rate is 79.06 per cent whereas the female literacy rate in rural area is 60.07 per cent. The male literacy rate in urban area is 90.7 per cent and in case of females the literacy rate is 80.4 per cent. Among the districts the highest literacy rate in rural areas noticed is in the district of Jagatsinghpur(86.5%) whereas the highest literacy rate in urban areas recorded is in the district of Khordha (91.0 %). The lowest literacy rate of 43.9 per cent is recorded in the rural areas of Nabarangpur district whereas the lowest urban literacy rate of 74.5 per cent is recorded in the district of Malkangiri. The highest male literacy rate of 92.5 per cent is recorded in the rural areas of Jagatsinghpur district whereas the highest urban male literacy rate recorded is in the district of Khordha (94.2 %). The lowest rural male literacy rate is recorded in the district of Koraput (54.1 %) whereas the lowest urban male literacy rate is recorded in the district of Malkangiri (83.4 %). The highest female literacy rate in rural areas is noticed in the district of Jagatsinghpur (80.4 %) whereas the lowest rural female literacy rate recorded is in the district of Koraput (31.3 %). The highest urban female literacy rate of 87.5 per cent is recorded in the district of Khordha whereas the lowest urban female literacy rate 64.9 per cent recorded is in the district of Malkangiri.

The reason for low status of women is because of discrimination in food, health care and play; and is often denied schooling. After attainment of puberty the girl is totally confined to the four walls of the house ultimately limits her education. The problem of child marriage, non-availability of girl's schools in and around the villages, early assumption of domestic responsibilities also cut short their education.

- **Tribal Literacy in Odisha**

According to the latest census (2011), out of 41,974,218 population, Scheduled Tribes constitute 95,90,756 which is 22.84 percent of the total population. The literacy level of Scheduled Tribes in the state presents a varied picture at regional and inter- district levels. Puri (74.62 percent) and Khurdha (69.33percent) have higher literacy rate while Malkangiri (35.23percent) and Koraput (35.36percent) have the lowest rate of literacy among tribes (Table 3). According to 2011 census over all literacy rate of the country is 73 per cent whereas, this figure for Odisha is 72.9 percent. The literacy rate of scheduled tribes in Odisha is a cause for concern, as it has consistently been lower than that of the total population. Table 3 represents District wise STs Literacy rate in Odisha .

**Table 3: District wise STs Literacy rate in Odisha**

Sl. No	Name of the District	Schedule Tribe Population	ST Literacy Rate
01	Angul	179603	61.86
02	Balasore	275678	50.06
03	Bargarh	281135	64.86
04	Bhadrak	30428	43.49
05	Bolangir	347164	54.93
06	Boudh	55364	63.84
07	Cuttack	93745	57.93
08	Deogarh	110400	62.38
09	Dhenkanal	162056	60.39
10	Gajapati	313714	43.66
11	Ganjam	118928	49.71
12	Jagatsinghpur	7862	66.55
13	Jajpur	151432	47.60
14	Jharsuguda	176758	68.72
15	Kalahandi	449456	49.29
16	Kandhamal	392820	58.34
17	Kendrapara	9484	62.39
18	Keonjhar	818878	53.24
19	Khurda	115051	69.33
20	Koraput	697583	35.36
21	Malkangiri	354614	35.23
22	Mayurbhanja	1479576	53.11
23	Nawapara	206327	51.01
24	Nawarangpur	681173	38.54
25	Nayagarh	58691	66.29
26	Puri	6129	74.62
27	Rayagada	541905	36.69
28	Sambalpur	355261	65.76
29	Sonepur	57192	66.78
30	Sundargarh	1062349	65.08
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9590756</b>	<b>52.24</b>

Source: Census 2011 (ST&SC Development, Minorities & Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of Odisha)

The comparison among SC and ST male & female literacy rate of 1981 census with that of the 1991 census & 2011 census has been made. The literacy level of both SC and ST women in Odisha is presented in the following table 4.

**Table 4: SC and ST Literacy Rate of Odisha: 1981 1991 2011 Census**

Types	1981		1991		2011	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Scheduled castes	35.26	9.40	52.42	20.74	79.21	58.76
Scheduled tribes	23.27	4.76	34.44	10.21	68.50	49.40

Source: Census of India 2001, series 22 prov. Population total Odisha, Ministry of Home Affairs

Since 1981-2011 Female literacy continues to be an area of concern despite notable achievement during last decade. ST female literacy increased from 23.27 per cent in 1981 to 49.40 percent during 2011. Even though literacy rates have increased over the years due to various programs targeted at it by the ministry as well as voluntary and non-governmental organisation, but there still exists a huge gap between the general and ST population literacy rates. From the census-2011, it is seen that in case of both general and tribal population the male literacy rate is higher in comparison to female literacy rate. The ST female Literacy rate is showing an increasing trend from 1991 to 2011. ST male Literacy rate has increased from 34.44 in 1991 to 68.50 in 2011 whereas ST female literacy has increased 39.19% in the same period. The rate of literacy among the scheduled tribes is 52.24% against the overall literacy rate of 72.9% of the State as per 2011 census. The tribal male and female literacy rates are 63.70% and 41.20% respectively. Over the last decade, there has been a significant improvement in literacy level among the STs in the State, which recorded an increase from 37.37% in 2001 to 52.24% in 2011.

Despite both the central and state government's continuous effort to improve the female literacy rate between the SCs and ST's still it is the lowest in the state. Although the incentives like free education, scholarships, stipends, free books, the government has provided mid-day meal, free residential school, etc., yet the result is quite depressing.

#### **Factors Imparting Girl's Education in Odisha**

One of the studies done by 'World Bank' has indicated that 32 million primary school age children in India are not in schools. The reason is that most of them belong to rural areas and largely in the categories of SCs, STs, economically backward castes, classes, backward caste minorities and above all, girl child. That is why here at this point it is highly essential to discuss the factors responsible for the lower female literacy rate in the state, i.e., 'enrolment in the schools' and 'dropout rates among the girls. At the entry point, that is, at the primary school level the rate of enrolment of girl child in the rural areas is very low and then as they move from primary school to upper primary school the dropout of girl child used to begin. The gap between male and female education widens with each higher level of education and at the stage of higher level of education it becomes even more pronounced. As far as enrolment of girl child is concerned, there is a wide gap between the rural and urban set-up. Not only this, it is even more pronounced in the tribal areas, where not only the enrolment rate is very poor but also the dropout rate among girl child is alarming one.

Women do double the work-as unpaid laborers in the home and as paid laborers outside the home. However, their work largely been unnoticed. Poorer the households, the more burden women have to shoulder. Nearly 70 per cent of the female workforce is engaged in farms either as cultivators or as laborers. They work from dusk to dawn. Far from recognizing their works, they are not given status in the society as workers. Tradition also feeds the practice of dowry death in which a woman is killed because she is unable to meet her in-laws demands for dowry. In Odisha, over a dozen women a day die as a result of such disputes as their in-laws consider their dowries inadequate justice. So preference is another insidious force directed against women, particularly in Asia, discrimination in health care also cut short the lives of unwarranted girl children in some regions. In some developing countries violent practices against women are often recognized and defended as strands of the cultural wave.

- More girl children are found to be malnourished as they are breast-fed for less time than boys and the food allocated to them is less or somewhat restricted. Girls are taken to the hospital only when emergencies arise.
- Poverty is attributed as main cause for which girls are deprived of education. The girls have to look after the siblings and do household works and even work outside to supplement their family income.
- Due to lack of parental awareness girls are not getting chance for education. Parents prefer boys education to girls education.
- Early marriage of girls is also a factor responsible for the high dropout rate of girls.
- Lack of separate institutions for girls is also a vital cause of non-enrolment and dropout of girls. As ours is a conservative society parents in some cases are reluctant to send their girls to co-education institutions.
- Insecurity for girls is a major concern which deters girls' education.
- Fixed school hour do not suit girls in rural areas, as they are wanted for domestic work or in the field.

These discriminatory treatments are the compelling reasons why the women need to be empowered. Education is the most vital element in empowering them, which acts as a force for social change. Women, therefore, need to be recognized not merely as wives and mothers but as vital and valuable members of the society. Apart from illiteracy and social neglect, women also lack ownership of productive assets which help in major decision making and above all, ensure livelihood.

#### **Women Empowerment in Odisha**

The Government of Odisha has implemented many welfare schemes framed by Government of India as well as the State giving all priority to the women but still it has been observed that women are not able to reach to the mainstream of the society so the state felt the need that is empowering women is not enough, they should take the initiative to justify the empowerment.

Empowerment through skill development and vocational training programmes from last few years Government of Odisha is emphasising on skill development and vocational training programmes, different Companies are being tied-up with the Government of Odisha. Those Companies are giving training to girls those who are drop out, 75 February - March - 2013 Odisha Review 10th pass, 10th + 2 pass or graduate in different fields such as hospitality, banking, tailoring etc. These programmes are

helping the girls to become financially independent and empowered. The Government has formulated thousands of women self-help groups and providing them loan through Bank linkage with sufficient subsidy to make them financially sound through different schemes such as Mission Shakti, WEP (women's Economic Programme) and swayamsiddha etc (by different Departments such as Department of Panchayati Raj and Department of Women and Child Welfare); also providing seasonal training for their capacity building, marketing support etc.

In the southern part of Odisha where the population of SC/ST are more and the literacy rate among the women are very less state Govt has opened many tribal schools under department of ST/SC Development, ITDA and special schools for girls such as KGBV (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya). To improve the health status of women, reduce maternal mortality especially in the areas which do not have good medical facilities, Odisha Government has introduced "Mamata" Scheme which is specially designed for the pregnant women and schemes like "Kisori Balika Yojana" for adult girls to provide them a healthy life.

### **Govt Initiative Fostering Women's Education**

#### **NPEGEL**

The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), is a focused intervention of Government of India, to reach the "Hardest to Reach" girls, especially those not in school. Launched in July 2003, it is an important component of SSA, which provides additional support for enhancing girl's education over and above the investments for girl's education through normal SSA interventions. The scheme would be applicable in the following areas –

Educationally Backward Block (EBB) where the Rural Female Literacy Rate is less than the National average (46.13%) and the Gender Gap is above the National average (21.59%). Block of the Districts having 10% SC/ST population and SC/ST Female Literacy Rate below 20%.

Identifies smaller Towns whose literacy rate got covered under block data, need to be qualified for covered under NPEGEL. Identified slum of larger cities, which are notified by the Ministry of Urban Development and poverty alleviation of Govt. of Odisha. Slums of Municipality & Municipal Corporations covered, as many slums looms in the out skirts of these Industrial, Town ships & big Cities. Census data 2001 was referred to finalize the list of small towns to be covered under this Programme.

Education is regarded as an important instrument and means for generating awareness and adequate knowledge and skills. So for the upliftment of women's status, awareness is needed and that could only be possible through education.

#### **Kanya Ashrams**

In order to check the dropout rate among girl child and to encourage the enrolment in the schools both the central and state governments are giving more priority to female education. In order to achieve this target, the government has established 37 Kanya Ashrams, which is imparting primary educational facilities for the girl child, especially for SC and ST girl children with residential facilities up to VII class in the KBK districts managed by SC and ST Development Department. There are also three special Adivasi (tribal) girls' hostels by 2000. Besides all these, there are four women **polytechnics** run by the government in the state. In the year 1999-2000, fifty vocational training institutes have been established, twenty-five institutions in the rural areas and twenty-five in the urban areas for the women in lower income groups.

There are also fifteen **working-women's hostels** in the state to support the employed women, those who are away from their homes. There is also another central government scheme operating in the state to provide financial grants of Rs. 500 per month to at least two girl children in the same house, belonging to the below poverty line. Besides all these, there are also total 42,104 primary schools 11,510 middle schools and 6,072 secondary schools in the state (Statistical Outline of Orissa, 1999). And the ratio between the student teacher per 100 students in the state is 2.8 in primary schools. These are some of the schemes and programs of the government to eradicate female illiteracy and to spread quality education through the state.

**Mission Shakti** is the self-help mission for empowering women through promotion of Women Self Help Groups (WSHG) to take up various socio-economic activities which was launched in the state on 8th March 2001 on the eve of International Women's Day.

The Govt. of Odisha also started schemes like establishment of model public schools in block level, supply of bicycles to the students of class 10 free of cost, upgradation of primary schools to upper primary and high schools, supply of four pairs of uniforms free of cost, training to teachers through Samarthya Programme, appointment of Sikha Sahayakas etc. for the development of education. Self-

defence programme for girls, supply of laptop to meritorious students, establishment of high schools, making the schools child friendly by 'Ama Vidyalaya' Yojana, organization of personality development camps for girls, training of MTA members, organization of 'Meenamela' are commendable steps of the Govt. of Odisha for empowerment of women. These schemes are very much helpful for motivating the girls in attending the schools. This helps in the path of women empowerment.

Why still we speak about women Empowerment It is a well acknowledged fact to one and all that Government of India has taken up various measures for women empowerment and has formulated many laws, articles, welfare schemes to empower the women socially, economically, politically etc. But still we witness dowry deaths, domestic violence, exploitation of women and it has been found that the women are getting divest from their rights and they are not able to come to the mainstream of men dominated society.

#### **Conclusion: Transformation is on the Horizon**

Despite having all these schemes and policies, the major obstacle on the way of female education are the poor infrastructural facilities for girl children like no toilets, no educational aids, lack of female teachers, access to school, high degree of absenteeism among teachers, unfavourable course pattern and above all, poverty and school dropouts. Pubescent girls are also withdrawn from schools because of the social dangers and fear associated with male school teachers and students. That's why parents are unwilling to send their girl children to the school which is also depriving the girls of formal education. These are the common features in Oriya society. Father of Nation Mahatma Gandhi observed in 'True Education' that: "The question of the education of children cannot be solved unless efforts are made simultaneously to solve the women's education." The more educated, enlightened and cultured the mothers are, the better intellectual, social and spiritual stimulation their children will receive. So, women's education plays a strategic role in empowering them in the future.

Special Program for Girl Children Literacy is required to bridge the gap in literacy levels between the general female population and tribal women, through facilitating 100% enrolments of tribal girls particularly vulnerable tribal groups. It should aim at reducing dropouts at the elementary level by creating the required ambience for education. Hostel facilities should be provided to enable the ST girls to attend regular school. Awareness should be promoted among parents towards the importance of girls' education.

But Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to bring the change. It requires the attitudinal change of the husband, father, brother, other Rural Development Fellow, (Under Ministry of Rural Development Government of India) as each one has to contribute in empowering girls through education.

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